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## Daddy Yankee Reveals U.S. Tour Plans



Daddy Yankee

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Mitchell Peters, L.A.

Reggaeton superstar Daddy Yankee will support his upcoming album "The Cartel: The Big Boss," due June 5 via El Cartel/Interscope, with a 40-city tour of the U.S. and Latin America, starting Aug. 31 at the Allstate Arena in Chicago, Billboard.com has learned.

The 18-city U.S. leg, which wraps Oct. 14 at the Toyota Center in Houston, will be Daddy Yankee's first Stateside jaunt since 2005's Who's Your Daddy arena trek. This year's Da Big Boss tour will visit such markets as Boston, New York, Miami, Las Vegas, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Dallas, among others. Ticket prices will range from \$40 to \$100.

Eight-year-old reggaeton artist Miguelito, who is signed to Daddy Yankee's El Cartel label, is slated to serve as the tour's opening act in the United States, according to concert promoter Henry Cardenas, CEO of Cardenas Marketing Network.

Daddy Yankee's 2005 tour marked the first time a reggaeton act headlined an arena tour in the United States. "There have been other acts that have tried to do arenas, but they haven't sold tickets," Cardenas tells Billboard.com. "[Daddy Yankee] appeals to Latinos and the general market, so it's a winning situation."

Leading up to the U.S. concerts, Daddy Yankee will play two warm-up shows in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, according to attorney Edwin Prado. And beyond the U.S. gigs, he will also perform 20-plus concerts in Mexico and South America through early December. In those markets, he'll play both arenas and 30,000 to 40,000-capacity stadiums.

For the American shows, Daddy Yankee is teaming with Ticketmaster and Apple's iTunes Music Store to give fans who pre-order "The Cartel: The Big Boss" a chance to score concert tickets through an early presale, says Prado, who was still locking down the deal at press time. The concept has also been used for album releases for Bob Dylan ("Modern Times"), Depeche Mode ("Playing the Angel") and Red Hot Chili Peppers ("Stadium Arcadium").

In 2008, Daddy Yankee will play select cities in the United States and Latin America, along with dates throughout Europe and Asia, according to Prado.

Further details about Da Bigg Boss tour will be announced at this year's Billboard Latin Music Conference and Awards, set for April 23-26 in Miami, Cárdenas says.

**Here are Daddy Yankee U.S. tour dates:**

Aug. 31: Chicago (Allstate Arena)  
Sept. 2: Boston (Agganis Arena @ Boston University)  
Sept. 7: New York (Madison Square Garden)  
Sept. 8: Washington, D.C. (Patriot Center)  
Sept. 9: Uncasville, Conn. (Mohegan Sun Arena)  
Sept. 14: Miami (American Airlines Arena)  
Sept. 15: Orlando, Fla. (TD Waterhouse)  
Sept. 21: Hidalgo, Texas (Dodge Arena)  
Sept. 22: Laredo, Texas (Laredo Entertainment Center)  
Sept. 23: San Antonio (AT&T Center)  
Sept. 28: Phoenix (US Airways Center)  
Sept. 29: Las Vegas (Mandalay Bay Events Center)  
Sept. 30: Fresno, Calif. (Save Mart Center)  
Oct. 5: San Francisco (Cow Palace)  
Oct. 6-7: Los Angeles (Gibson Amphitheatre)  
Oct. 13: Dallas (American Airlines Center)  
Oct. 14: Houston (Toyota Center)

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February 5, 2006

## The King of Reggaetón

By SARA CORBETT

A long time ago, before he started draping himself in huge diamond medallions, before flocks of teenage girls began trailing him nearly everywhere, before he had a staff of 15 working day and night on the maintenance of his image, Daddy Yankee had a regular name, which was Raymond Ayala. When he is at home in Puerto Rico, his parents still call him Raymond, as does his older brother Nomar, who works as one of his managers, his wife, Mirredys Gonzalez, who is another manager, and his former neighbors at Villa Kennedy, the run-down San Juan public-housing project where he lived until a few years ago. To just about everybody else, he is Daddy Yankee.

He picked this name for himself back when he was a teenager obsessed with rap music. He watched music videos on MTV and BET and loved what he saw there. He identified with guys like Dr. Dre and Rakim and Big Daddy Kane, the first-generation rappers, even though he was a Spanish speaker who'd never left Puerto Rico and couldn't understand a thing they said. He was, by his own account, a pudgy young kid with no money but possessing a certain brazen faith in his own possibility, a sense that he, too, would outgrow not just his name but his circumstances too. At 13, he rechristened himself Daddy Yankee. In street slang, it means "powerful man." The next year, he started rapping in Spanish, using a friend's four-track recorder, spitting out unrefined lyrics over a speeded-up beat borrowed from Jamaican dancehall reggae.

These days, when Daddy Yankee, who is now 29, performs before throngs of adulatory fans, he will sometimes shout out alternative names for himself, including *El Cangri* (the chief) and *El Rey* (the king). All this is meant to emphasize his place at the forefront of reggaetón, a rapidly growing musical genre that mixes Spanish-language hip-hop with the complex rhythms of Caribbean music. With its signature syncopated boom-pa-dum-dum beat and boisterous, often raunchy lyrics — not to mention the libidinous grind it inspires on the dance floor — reggaetón has infiltrated nightclubs and radio airwaves with a speed and vigor that has surprised even canny record-company executives. Daddy Yankee's album "Barrio Fino," which was released in 2004, has sold more than 1.6 million copies in the United States, spent 24 weeks on top of Billboard's Latin charts and won Yankee several prizes, including a Latin Grammy. The album's hit single, "Gasolina," became a party anthem that — akin to Ricky Martin's 1999 hit "Livin' La Vida Loca" — broke out of the Latin niche and was embraced by masses of clubgoing, booty-shaking Anglo-Americans.

Despite the fact that Americans bought 48 million fewer record albums last year than in 2004, one bright spot for the music industry was Latin music: sales grew by 12 percent, according to Nielsen SoundScan. At least some of that success is owed to reggaetón and by extension to Daddy Yankee, its top-selling act. Reggaetón's biggest hits, which are almost exclusively in Spanish, have found their way into the mix at Top-40 radio stations, playing at health clubs and high-school dances all over the United States.

When I flew to San Juan in November to meet Daddy Yankee, he had just returned to Puerto Rico for the first time in several months, having completed a 16-stop tour of the U.S. and Latin America, plus

studio sessions to record new songs to add to "Barrio Fino en Directo," a live version of "Barrio Fino," which would make its debut in mid-December. The early release of his single, "Rompe," a pulsing dance track embroidered with Yankee's trademark staccato rhyming, was climbing to No. 1 on the Latin charts. By late January, it would become the fourth-most-requested video on MTV's decidedly mainstream show "Total Request Live." He had also finished up a frenzied round of corporate deal making with a squad of marketing executives who seemed to have finally grasped Daddy Yankee's exceptional ability to reach and influence the Latino youth market.

"Everybody wants a piece of Yankee," said Lourdes Perez, his chief publicist, as we sat inside an air-conditioned shopping mall on the east side of San Juan, waiting for her charge to surface.

I was third in line for him that day, behind a local newspaper reporter and photographer who had been waiting almost two hours to meet him. Perez, a petite woman wearing high heels and a silk suit, has the unenviable job of marshaling both the artist and the growing number of people who require something from him. Most of her energy was directed toward a relentless speed-dial volley between Yankee's primary handlers — his brother and his wife — and his new corporate overlords. Reebok people were flying in to San Juan for a photo session the next day. Interscope Records, which had just signed him to a \$20 million, five-album deal, needed Yankee in L.A. for a video shoot in two days.

By the time Daddy Yankee stepped out of his silver BMW sedan into the steamy heat of midday, dressed nattily in a black T-shirt and an impeccably pressed pair of jeans, two pancake-size diamond-crusted "DY" medallions dangling auspiciously from his neck, San Juan's lunch hour was in full swing. Office workers disgorged through the revolving doors of their corporate towers. A flock of uniformed schoolgirls alighted on the corner. Heads swiveled. Traffic slowed. Drivers lowered their windows. At a nearby Pizzeria Uno, a group of waitresses abandoned their tables to rush outside, pens and notepads lofted in anticipation of an autograph.

The first cries came on cue: "Yankeeeee!" And from the schoolgirls, who were now hunting in their bags for their cellphone cameras: "Ohmigod, ohmigod, ohmigod!" A slow grin spread across Daddy Yankee's face. He raised a fist in a dynamic salute to the drivers on the street. He signed somebody's \$10 bill. He signed an old lady's shirt. He flung an arm around each one of the schoolgirls, smiling boyishly for their cameras. Posing with male fans, he put on a tough-guy frown, at the same time leveling an index finger in their direction, as if to say, "No, you're the man." The crowd doubled, and then doubled again, like so many dividing cells.

A half-hour later, the only person sulking was the local photographer, who wanted to catch Daddy Yankee in an authentic moment — standing in front of a graffiti-covered wall, leaning up against a streetlight, anything. But it was not going to happen. The hubbub had simply become too great.

**S**pend time with Daddy Yankee, and inevitably, as rappers tend to do, he will start talking about "what's real." Being home in Puerto Rico, for example, is real. Reggaeton is real. And most important, he himself is real.

What he means by this is that despite the recent bonanza of five-star hotel stays and glowing reviews of his work, he is still, at heart, the son of a crime-ridden San Juan barrio — and his music still represents this. It is, of course, the existential quandary of any ghetto-proud artist whose street credibility starts to erode as success carries him further from the streets, but Yankee seems openly pained by the prospect.

With three young children and millions of newly earned dollars, he has moved his family to a roomy house in the beachfront area of Isla Verde, but he also owns the three-room public-housing apartment

where he and Mirredys, whom he married when he was 17, lived until 2001. "The first thing I do when I get back from traveling," he said, "is go home, take a shower and drive over to my neighborhood."

We were riding through San Juan in the backseat of his car, which was piloted by his brother Nomar, a soft-spoken and loosely paternal presence. In what seemed to be a regular habit, Yankee had taken off his diamond pendants, which are elaborately scrolled renderings of his initials, made for him by a jeweler in the Bronx, and hung them over the headrest of the front seat. Behind a pair of glinting sunglasses, he stared out the window at the hodgepodge of low-slung pastel bungalows, the dilapidated bodegas and panaderías of Barrio Obrero, the impoverished residential area where he once lived. "The street is my inspiration," he said. "If I got disconnected from this, I'd lose my music."

San Juan is a beautiful, tired city, lush with palm trees and powdery sand beaches. Behemoth cruise ships sit nosed up to its piers; casinos clang and jingle on the waterfront. Old San Juan, colonized by the Spanish in the 1500's, has the same sultry charm as Seville. Beyond it, though, lie neighborhoods of squat, hurricane-resistant houses, whose cheerful paint belies a different reality. Fed by a bountiful drug trade, San Juan's streets are famously violent. Puerto Rico's per capita murder rate in 2004 was more than three times the average of the rest of America. "I can't tell you how many times I've woken up at 3 in the morning to the sound of a mother screaming and crying because she's lost her son," Yankee said. "You learn to be a warrior here. You have no other choice."

Yankee says he carries a bullet lodged in his right thigh, a souvenir of a gang-related shooting in a caserío — a housing project — when he was 16. He was leaving the apartment of DJ Playero, one of the first producers of reggaetón. It was, he claims, a case of mistaken identity. He spent the next six months in bed; it was a year before he could walk. That hiatus from street life was what persuaded him that he should focus full time on making music. He went to college as well, earning an associate's degree in accounting in 1998, in order to help himself better navigate the music business. "I thank God every day for that bullet," he said.

At times, Daddy Yankee can sound like an evangelist, sermonizing about the plight of the urban underclass, pointing out both the richness and depravity of life on his native island. One of the most powerful tracks on "Barrio Fino" is "Corazones," a ferociously delivered bit of protest poetry that laments the "spirit of death" in Puerto Rico, implores politicians to budget more money for teachers and proposes a gang truce. (Privately, he acknowledges that his hopes are unrealistic but nonetheless worth voicing.) Yankee's ultimate power, however, lies in the ability to switch between agendas. "Corazones" is preceded on the album by "Dale Caliente" (which translates to "Give It to Me Hot"), a jumpy, insistent tune in which Yankee jubilantly addresses the ladies, directing them in Spanish to "move those butt cheeks till the earth trembles."

Yankee's music — and indeed a substantial amount of reggaetón — is built to fuel that earth-trembling, hormonal energy of nightclubs, parties and concerts. In San Juan, club attire for women is normally high heels, bare legs and just enough spandex to cover the parts that need covering. The dance style most in vogue is a graphic, butt-to-crotch meld referred to as "el perreo" — the doggie. And reggaetón lyrics, even when laced with social consciousness about race and class and life in the ghetto, are often a call, specifically addressed to female clubgoers, for more dancing and less clothing.

Yankee passes little time in clubs these days, saying that he prefers to spend nights in his recording studio with friends or to be with his wife and children — ages 7, 9 and 11. He does not drink or use drugs, saying that alcohol was "an issue" in his house while he was growing up. By all accounts, he is a tireless worker and a shrewd businessman, having started his own record label, El Cartel, when he was just 21. He put out four albums this way — overseeing everything from manufacturing to marketing himself. Now that he has help from a big label, his associates say he is fixated on pushing his music onto



the world stage. "Two years ago he couldn't hold a conversation in English," says Edwin Prado, Yankee's San Juan-based attorney and business manager. "But the kid is disciplined. He learned it quick."

According to Prado, Yankee asks him to practice media interviews in English during the three-hour-plus flights they regularly take between New York and San Juan. Perhaps as a result, Yankee comes off as polite, articulate and polished to a high gloss. He is careful not to slag any of his fellow reggaeton artists, even though there is a widely reported rivalry between Yankee and the almost-as-successful 26-year-old rapper Don Omar. ("I've been through a lot of beef with other singers," Yankee told me, "but it's all verbal.") He speaks warmly of his parents, who are now divorced, describing his father, a one-time percussionist for some of Puerto Rico's best-known salsa acts, as a "humble dude" and his mother, a manicurist responsible for raising the family's four children, as loving but "very strict."

Depending on what the moment calls for, Yankee can pout and sneer with thuggish authority, and he can work a certain coltish charm. He speaks to women in a buttery, lilting voice and will impulsively reach out to squeeze your arm in order to emphasize a point. "You feel me, mama?" he will say, deeply earnest. And it is hard not to. With men — even the square, marketing types with whom he now regularly deals — Yankee adeptly goes through the motions of bad-boy camaraderie, punching fists and amiably yo-what-upping with each new acquaintance. "I know how to read people," he said. "When you grow up in a rough environment, you have to have a sixth sense."

Like any good rapper, Daddy Yankee practices a stylized brand of showmanship, wielded most dramatically when he is performing live. During his tour of the U.S. last year, he arrived onstage dressed in a pristine white suit and ermine robe, perched on a golden throne. Last February, performing at a televised Latin music awards ceremony, he glided from the rafters in a tricked-out, floating Lamborghini, peering down at the audience and a waiting line of scantily clad female dancers, shouting something that could be construed as a rallying cry for Latino power. "We're ready!" he called emphatically, his head bobbing to an intensifying beat. "We're ready!"

Reggaeton is not for everyone. Its hammering snare drums and nasal melodies may seem wearily one-dimensional, especially for those who don't speak Spanish. At its best, however, the music blends a rich mix of cultures. Here, the verbal wizardry of hip-hop plays off a variety of traditional tropical sounds, including salsa, merengue, Dominican bachata and even bomba and plena, the heavily percussive forms of music brought to Puerto Rico by African slaves working on sugar plantations and their descendants. "It sounds completely different from anything else," says Leila Cobo, Billboard magazine's bureau chief for Latin music, citing reggaeton's distinctive and highly danceable rhythm. "You cannot mistake it for hip-hop, and you certainly can't mistake it for pop."

It was another group of workers, Jamaicans living in Panama, who introduced reggae and, later, its quick-tempoed cousin, dancehall reggae, to the Latin world. In 1991, a Panamanian singer named El General took dancehall's rollicking beat and added Spanish lyrics, which in turn sparked excitement in Puerto Rico. As American hip-hop drifted down from the north and dancehall floated up from the south, the two genres became the music of choice at San Juan's nightclubs and house parties, even as Puerto Rican radio remained devoted to salsa, pop and merengue.

At the time, Daddy Yankee was among a handful of aspiring young rappers collaborating regularly with DJ Playero, whom he refers to as the godfather of reggaeton. Working with low-tech equipment in a home studio, Playero created a steady flow of mix-tape compilations by local artists, which were then sold from apartments and car trunks, further fueling the underground party circuit. "We were doing hip-hop and dancehall, but it wasn't ours," Yankee recalled. "Then we started to play both beats at once. We

took dancehall and hip-hop and mixed it in the middle. I knew we had something. I thought, 'This sound is Puerto Rican sound.'

The earliest incarnation of that sound was a demonically fast drumbeat overlaid with urgent, often incendiary rap. Raquel Z. Rivera, who teaches sociology at Tufts University and is the author of "New York Ricans From the Hip Hop Zone," is at work on a book about reggaetón. She describes early reggaetón lyrics as "not just explicit, but violently explicit" and "extremely misogynistic" and also "wildly popular" in the barrios. Daddy Yankee simply describes it all as "real." He remembers bringing cassettes to radio stations. "I'd say, 'Play this, play this.' It's what's being played in the street, it's what's real, but they didn't pay any attention."

Eventually, reggaetón compilations began selling more formally in stores, though not without controversy. In February 1995, acting on charges that the music's lyrics violated local obscenity laws, police officers raided six record stores around San Juan, confiscating hundreds of CD's and cassettes. In 2001, a senator in the island's Legislature agitated loudly but unsuccessfully for a ban on reggaetón, claiming that it incited violence and was degrading to women. The debate only further stoked reggaetón's outlaw popularity among urban kids. "We were speaking about drugs, about wars on the streets, wars in the government," Yankee said. "We were using bad words, but that was real. It was how we talked. In reggaetón, you say what you want. That's the essence of the movement."

For the next several years, reggaetón continued to fulminate largely below the surface. "It was like a cult of teenagers buying the music," says Eddie Fernandez, vice president for U.S. Latin and Latin America at Sony/ATV Music Publishing. "Reggaetón artists had no radio airplay at all. The major record guys and people in their 30's never paid attention to them. They said, 'Eh, this is nothing.'"

Along the way, reggaetón started to travel, arriving in places like New York, Orlando and Boston in the suitcases of itinerant Puerto Ricans. "Suddenly it was coming from boom boxes, from cars, from homes," recalls Rivera, who is based in New York. "Little by little, it started spreading, first to Puerto Ricans living in New York and then to Dominicans." The music industry began to catch on only slowly. In 2002, Universal Music bought distribution rights to a number of reggaetón artists' works, including Daddy Yankee's, from a Puerto Rican label called VI Music. Various D.J.'s in the U.S. further helped to cross-pollinate reggaetón and hip-hop by remixing hits from artists like Jennifer Lopez and LL Cool J with the reggaetón beat.

And then there was "Gasolina." Written in 2003 by Daddy Yankee and fellow reggaetón artist Eddie Dee, with help from reggaetón's most dynamic producers, a young duo known as Luny Tunes, "Gasolina" created its own weather. The song is both imperious and hollow, a pitch-perfect party tune involving a call and response between Yankee and a cloying female chorus — one that has now been reproduced by keyed-up nightclub crowds all over the world. The lyrics describe a girl who "loves gasoline" — *le gusta la gasolina* — which Yankee says is a Puerto Rican way of describing a girl who likes to live a life of "cruising around in cars." The song, which has a popular remix version featuring the mainland rappers Pitbull, Lil Jon and N.O.R.E., involves women calling for more gasoline and the men boasting about how they'll give it to them. Read this however you like.

"That song changed everything," Cobo, the Billboard editor, says. "If it weren't for 'Gasolina,' the mainstream wouldn't have ever heard about reggaetón."

Like hip-hop before it, reggaetón has evolved over time to be more palatable to the masses. The rhythms have slowed, and in deference to the requirements for radio play, lyrics tend to be cleaner than they once were, though they remain stacked with double-entendres about sex and partying. Puerto Rico has two

radio stations devoted exclusively to reggaetón, and reggaetón artists are now regularly asked to perform at political rallies in Puerto Rico. "The same politicians who were shunning reggaetón are now campaigning to it," Rivera says. "It's gotten that popular." Daddy Yankee, in particular, has become an icon of Puerto Rican pride. "Until maybe two years ago, the older generations were not claiming reggaetón at all," Rivera says. "It's only very recently that there seems to be a consensus that reggaetón represents Puerto Ricans properly to the rest of the world."

The music's growth on mainland America has contributed to a mini-revolution in radio programming. Last year, Clear Channel switched four of its English-language stations in major markets like Houston and Miami to a Hispanic-urban format called *Hurban*, featuring reggaetón and Latin hip-hop. Univision Radio similarly has converted seven of its Spanish-language stations from more traditional Latin music like merengue and salsa to a reggaetón-driven format known as *La Kalle*. Reggaetón's kinship with hip-hop seems to have helped it jump many of the regional fences traditionally dividing the Latin music market, where in the U.S., Mexican-derived music has long ruled the West Coast and Caribbean music has dominated the East. "It's unified the Latin masses," Daddy Yankee told me, adding that he believes reggaetón is especially popular with second-generation immigrants, even those who don't speak Spanish. "The music makes them feel Latino," he said. "It's in their heart."

The recording industry has scrambled to keep pace with the boom, dispensing representatives to prowl San Juan nightclubs in search of new talent and speedily inventing labels that cater to the young *Hurban*ites. In the last year, Universal Music has created a Latin hip-hop label called *Machete Music*; Wu-Tang Records unveiled *Wu-Tang Latino*; P. Diddy started *Bad Boy Latino*; and the hip-hop impresario Jay-Z joined with Def Jam Records to create *Roc La Familia*. It's hard to question the wisdom of these investments: census figures show that the Hispanic population is growing at three times the rate of the overall U.S. population and more than half of the 41 million Latinos living in the United States are under age 29.

**W**hen I met with Prado, Daddy Yankee's voluble business manager and chief corporate deal maker, his outlook was just shy of gleeful. "The numbers are talking," he said, as multiple cellphones rang from the pockets of his suit. "The U.S. is becoming a Spanish-speaking nation." In other words, these are good days to be making money from someone who makes money by touching the hearts of Latino kids.

There is a corresponding, told-you-so swagger to be found among Puerto Rico's collection of rising stars — reggaetón artists like Tego Calderón, Don Omar and Wisin y Yandel, among others — who are now doing things like touring Japan and taking meetings with pinstriped corporate people. Their vindication is rich but also paradoxical: in creating a platform for what Yankee refers to as "poor people's music," they've allowed the rich people in. It's the same trajectory that gangsta rappers of the past once traveled, a rite of initiation from the street world into the sales world that can be exhilarating, soul-killing and insanely lucrative.

Daddy Yankee remains, for the moment, the best-selling artist of the bunch. He is quick to correct the impression that he or any of his compatriots are overnight sensations. "We've been doing this for more than 10 years," he told me. "Even though we didn't have the tools or the resources to make music, we did it. We made something new." There was a territorial edge to his pride, one that hinted that he was aware of the opportunism that now surrounded him. "It's our music," he said. "It's our movement."

We were just pulling into Villa Kennedy, Yankee's old caserío. Nomar parked the BMW on the grass, and Yankee climbed out. Tucked away from the main street, Villa Kennedy is a collection of three-story apartment buildings set next to an overgrown field about 10 miles east of the city center. A breeze sifted through the almond trees. Two scruffy chickens pecked their way across the yard. Yankee seemed



palpably to relax, taking a seat on a low wall as word of his arrival spread. Children coasted over on their bikes. A woman opened her window to shout hello.

For the next hour, a small group of people sat with him in the late-day sun, chattering at a high pitch, doling out advice and recollections: invest your money well. Don't get spoiled. We remember you when you were gordito — a little fat boy. Daddy Yankee laughed and nodded his head. Earlier in the day, he told me that Puerto Ricans see him as a mirror to themselves and to the island. His success, in other words, was theirs.

"In hip-hop, when you become a big star, it's like you don't belong in the 'hood anymore," he said. "But here, it's the opposite. They're proud." He also offered a bold declaration about his future: "I want to be a true-born leader who is going to take his whole country to a high level without sacrificing who we are." However pretentious or possibly naïve the thought may have been, it was also utterly sincere. It was, as Yankee might say, real.

Another apartment door opened then. An elderly man dressed in work clothes peered down from the porch and waved enthusiastically. "Mira," the man called to some unseen person behind him in the cool shadows, "vuelva Raymond!" Look, Raymond is back!

The following day I met the sneaker version of Daddy Yankee. It's a nice shoe, more lifestyle wear than athletic wear, and carefully designed to represent Yankee as best as a stitched piece of leather can represent anybody. The sneaker's upper has a box-weave pattern, inspired by the Caribbean straw hat, I was told, and the sock liner — the foamy insert that covers the sole — has a map of Latin America sketched over it.

"It's clean; it's classy; it's sophisticated," a Reebok product manager was telling Yankee, as the reggaeton star examined prototypes of the sneaker in different colors. We were in a rented photo studio in Old San Juan. Yankee had three publicists on hand that day, in addition to Nomar and Prado. Four people had flown in from Reebok's headquarters in Massachusetts, as well as a photographer and two assistants.

Yankee seemed pleased with his sneaker, and also with the complete "DY" apparel line Reebok intends to introduce in the spring. The proposed copy for the print advertising campaign was "For the people." Yankee nodded his head as this was explained to him. "The concept is good, powerful," he said. "The message is there: I'm representing you."

The contract with Reebok was brand new. In fact, several of the Reebok reps confessed they'd known virtually nothing of Daddy Yankee before he signed with the company. "We'd heard he was a key player in the Hispanic market," Lisa Cardoso said with a shrug. Cardoso is Reebok's lifestyle-and-entertainment marketing manager, in charge of wrangling the company's celebrity endorsers, including the rappers Jay-Z, Nelly and 50 Cent. Yankee could meet them all, she said, at the N.B.A. All-Star weekend in Houston. He *should* go, she told his publicist Lourdes Perez as they huddled in a conference. Reebok could arrange a performance. Yankee could make what she called "good connections."

With Interscope planning to release Daddy Yankee's first major-label album later this year, the pressure was already beginning to mount. Connections mattered. Celebrity mattered. Its success will likely be viewed as a measure of reggaeton's staying power, its ability to cross over into a larger market. "The fact that Yankee signed with a mainstream label indicates that a lot of people — not just him — think he's got a possibility beyond Latin," says Leila Cobo of Billboard. According to Prado, the new album, titled "El Cartel," will have Yankee rapping in a mix of Spanish and English, though he noted the delicate

cultural line his client must walk. "It's important to get his message into English," Prado said, "but he can't lose what he's about."

As the photo shoot in San Juan got under way, Daddy Yankee donned a freshly manufactured midnight blue jacket with royal blue trim and a "DY" logo embroidered over the heart. He wore dark sunglasses and his diamond "DY" pendants, plus two diamond bracelets and an enormous pinky ring. The photographer set him up against a blinding white backdrop and began to shoot.

Yankee knew what to do. He threw back his shoulders, raised his chin proudly and stared down the camera, his lips set in a firm line. "Yeah, that's hot," said the photographer, from behind the lens. "Look at the clothes," he added. And when Yankee gingerly touched a finger to the logo on his jacket, the shutter clicked even more furiously.

Between takes, everybody turned away — the photo team to check the images as they appeared on a laptop, the publicists to resume work on their cellphones, the Reebok people to confer about marketing plans. Yankee's expression slackened. Behind him was a scrim of white paper, a big blank expanse that was just a holding place for what would be the advertisement's real backdrop — some gritty-looking, Latin-looking street location to be Photoshopped in later.

An assistant handed him a sneaker, and the shooting started up again. Yankee lifted the shoe to eye level and gave it a hard, meaningful look. "Yeah," the photographer encouraged, "hold that." Then, abruptly, they all turned away again, examining the image on the computer screen, back on the phone, back in conference. Only Daddy Yankee stood there, beneath the glaring lights, still holding his pose.

Sara Corbett is a contributing writer for the magazine.